THE

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. I. October 18, 1935 Tishri 21, 5696 No. 12

EDITORIALS

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by Mordecai M. Kaplan

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EMPTY GESTURES

By Ben Zion Bokser

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THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM

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THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST POSITION

WE approach our task from the point of view of Judaism as a religious civilization. We envisage Judaism as the proper concern of all Jews, religious and unreligious, conservative and radical. . . .

IN affirming that Judaism is a civilization we give emphasis to the fact that it includes . . . communal organization, language, law, art, mores, customs, as well as religion. Moreover, all of these elements are organically related to each other; to omit any of them is to distort Judaism. All of them are functions of the group life of Israel and cannot be maintained unless we maintain the unity and integrity of the Jewish people and the continuity of its spiritual efforts.

WE believe that the material and spiritual welfare of the Jews can be achieved only through Jewish communal organization. . . . We favor the establishment of Jewish communal life in America, democratically administered and organized in such a manner as to include all Jews who wish to identify themselves with the Jewish people, regardless of what their personal philosophy may be.

IN affirming that Judaism is a *religious* civilization, we recognize first, the historic fact that the God idea has dominated the entire pattern of Jewish life in the past, and that continuity with our past is impossible without giving to religion a position, if not of primacy, at least of *primus inter pares;* and secondly, the social fact that a mature and complete civilization is bound to find expression in the idea of God and in forms of religious worship in which the hopes and ideals of human life are rendered articulate. It is that very sense of need for religion that impels us to reinterpret the traditional beliefs in keeping with what for us must be a tenable world outlook, and to revise and develop the traditional usages in keeping with spiritual needs which we can genuinely experience.

WE consider the establishment of Palestine indispensable to the life of Judaism in the diaspora. We seek to enable Jewish civilization so to root itself in the soil of Palestine as to make of the land the cultural center for Israel's intellectual and spiritual rebirth. We oppose any attempt to render Palestine the object of imperialist aims or the victim of private profit-seeking. We endorse every effort toward the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth in Palestine based upon social justice and social cooperation. . . .

WE are opposed to Fascism in every form. We object to any philosophy of government which seeks to curtail the rights of individuals to the free purusit of personal salvation through participation in any religious or cultural activity, or through affiliation with any national or ethnic group. . . . Recognizing the horror and irrationality of war as a means of adjusting conflicting interests, we shall support every effort looking to the perfection of machinery for the peaceful adjudication of such conflicts and to the utilization of such machinery as exists, wherever possible. Under no circumstances shall we give countenance or support to an imperialistic war that is designed to advance the interests of exploiting and oppressing classes. . . .

SOCIAL righteousness is possible only upon the establishment of a cooperative society, the elimination of the profit system, and the public ownership of all natural resources and basic industries. Until these objectives are achieved our sympathies and our support go to labor in its struggle with its employers for a more equitable distribution of the income of industry, and in the assertion of its right to organize for the protection of its interests without interference from its employers.

—*From "The Reconstructionist," January* 11, 1935.

THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

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EDITORIALS

Budgeting Our Jewish Obligations

THIS is the time of the year when the Jewish people, shaking off to some extent the sloth of the summer months, gives attention to the initiation or stimulation of Jewish undertakings of all kinds. The slack season in Judaism is over and the busy season begins with a rush. We are admonished on all sides to make room in our plan of life for our Jewish obligations. It is well that we are so reminded, for it is very easy for us, in our preoccupation with our economic affairs, to forget our Jewish interests altogether. But it is not enough for us to know that we have Jewish obligations and to make provision for them, as it were, *en bloc*. They are so manifold, and our resources are so limited, that we must budget our Jewish obligations, assessing their relative importance and deciding questions of priority among them. Unless we do so, we are bound to neglect some of them, and not necessarily those of minor importance.

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST will not presume to budget your Jewish obligations for you. The priority that must be assigned to some over others is necessarily determined for each individual by special circumstances and personal interest. But there are certain principles, largely of a negative character, that should be kept in mind in allocating our expenditures of money and effort among Jewish institutions that claim our support. To these we would call attention.

One of these principles is more or less implied in the *halakic* rule, "As between the performance of a more frequent and a less frequent *mizvah*, the more frequent has the priority." The implication is that the more frequent *mizvah* answers a more permanent and constant want which is, therefore, presumably more fundamental. There is, however, a tendency to be more interested in the novel or rare. Men will be loyal to their government in a crisis to the extent of risking their lives in war at its behest, but will systematically dodge the payment of their taxes on which the government depends for its very ability to function. Similarly, Jews are more willing to contribute sporadically to drives and campaigns in emergency situations than to pay regular dues to a permanent communal organization. They tend to forget that such an organization, if adequately supported, would, by reason of its continuous experience, trained personnel and accumulated assets, be able to forestall many an emergency and, in any case, would be better prepared to meet it than any hastily conceived campaign organization.

Another type of mistake in budgeting our Jewish obligations is due to defective spiritual vision. Some see only the things

that are near, and some only the things that are far. There is justice in the thought that "charity" (and the same may be said of other virtues) "begins at home." For some people, however, their range of vision seems to extend no farther than their home. For them charity and other virtues not only begin but also end at home. These are the people who cannot give to Zionism, overseas relief or the maintenance of national institutions of Jewish learning because their local synagogue, community center or pet philanthropy has first claim to their support.

There are those, on the other hand, whose interest in a cause seems proportionate to its remoteness from their immediate environment. The type of Christian who interests himself in foreign missions but neglects spiritual needs nearer home is frequently the butt of satirical criticism. We have similar types among us Jews, men who contribute through the Zionist Organization to the perpetuation of Jewish nationhood but neglect the Jewish education of their children, thus denying to them the benefits of Jewish national life; or men who grow excited over the exclusion of Jews from the economic life of Germany by the Nazis, but do nothng to protect American Jewry from exclusion from the cultural and economic life of America. It is significant that organizations like the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee, while they find no end of work to be done for Jewry abroad, seem to think, if we judge them by their activities, that Jewish life in America presents few problems and that the Jews in America have no unsatisfied Jewish wants.

Finally, we must guard against the error of those who are so interested in one worthy cause that they fail to acknowledge concurrent obligations but would defer the discharge of all other responsibilities until the social goal in which they are interested has been achieved. Thus there are those who tell us that Jewish communal organization must be deferred until a cooperative social order has displaced our present capitalist economy; or that, so long as the material needs of Jews are not satisfied, their cultural needs must be neglected; or that, until the Jewish national home in Palestine has been established, the problem of organizing the Jewish diaspora must be postponed. The life of a social organism, like that of an individual organism, demands the concurrent and cooperative functioning of various organs, each of which is equally vital. No physician will suggest that a patient whose heart is weak should suspend the activities of respiration and digestion until the vital circulatory system is restored to normal functioning. Similarly, in discharging our Jewish obligations we must recognize the concurrent demands of a variety of vital Jewish activities, and not make our interest in one an excuse for neglecting all others.

If Jews were to be guided in budgeting their Jewish interests by some of the above considerations, there would be ample room for the exercise of personal preference in evaluating the demands that our Jewish interests may make on us, but there would be a more vigorous expression of the Jewish spirit than now prevails, and a more harmonious and progressive Jewish life.

Exploiting Jewish Life

WITH the approach of Election day, the sensitive observer of American Jewish life becomes particularly aware of an evil which has infested Jewish institutional life. It is the evil of the Jewish politician who exploits Jewish life for his own ends. The politician may be an aspirant for office, one who already occupies an office and keeps one eye focused on the next election contest, a judge, or a political boss. A member of this species joins a congregation, an educational, philanthropic, or Zionist organization to impress the Jewish voter and his non-Jewish political superior. To the former, he demon-

strates his loyalty to his people and their institutions, and he hopes thereby to prove beyond question his respectability, his honesty, and his integrity. In turn, he demonstrates to his political leader the esteem in which his fellow Jews hold him —and the consequent faith which they have in his political talent.

Those Jews who are sincerely interested in the advancement of Jewish causes are often tempted to condone this evil because it has its apparently beneficial aspects. The influential politician has many friends whom he persuades to join the synagogue. His demagogic manner comes in very handy when funds have to be raised. His political connections enable him to procure well known speakers for lectures and forums. And not at all infrequently, he is a man of means who in his own right constitutes a source of financial strength not to be ignored.

These circumstances, however, should not blind us to the fact that the politician does Jewish life serious harm. When an institution no longer serves his purpose, he is likely to abandon it. Free criticism of the status quo and of governmental policies is bound to be stifled if the politician occupies an official position. Worst of all, intelligent and sincere Jews are disgusted by this prostitution of Jewish life, and whatever little loyalty still remains is driven out of them.

What can be done to correct this evil? One might be tempted to refer it to our national organizations, for investigation and publicity. But sadly enough, even our national organizations suffer from the same malady. Many of their leaders are using Jewish life to help raise themselves to a higher rung on the political ladder.

The fact is that this evil, like so many others, is only a symptom of an organic disease. Jewish life is riddled through with individualism and competition. It is almost impossible to treat this problem locally. Jewish institutions need support and will take it from anyone who offers it. These unscrupulous men are entrenched, and no individual organization or synagogue is prepared to clean its own house while others profit by the evil.

But at least we can appeal to the decent instincts of our people not to *condone* but to condemn the situation. Know it for what it is, and when American Jewry is prepared to revolutionize its entire structure of organization, the "rascals" will be "thrown out."

The "Agunah" Controversy

THE reader of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST, if he is not also a reader of the Yiddish press, may be unaware of the fact that the Orthodox rabbinate has recently launched a violent attack on the Conservative. On the surface, the issue involved relates to an ordinance which was recently adopted by the Rabbinical Assembly of America and which deals with a technical problem in Jewish law. More fundamentally considered, however, the controversy is of much wider significance. It is one phase of the age-old struggle between those who wish to preserve Jewish law as a frozen formula and those who, respecting the authority of Jewish law, wish nonetheless to adapt it to contemporary conditions.

In May 1935, the Rabbinical Assembly of America, after years of careful study, promulgated a resolution concerning the *Agunah*. This ordinance was designed to alleviate the hardships imposed by Jewish law on women who have been deserted or civilly divorced by their husbands. According to Talmudic jurisprudence only the husband can issue a bill of divorcement to his wife. Furthermore, in the eyes of Jewish law, a divorce issued by civil courts does not dissolve a marriage. If then the husband cannot be found, or if he refuses to grant a *get* despite the fact that the courts of the land may have dissolved the marriage, his wife is still, from the point of view of Jewish jurisprudence,

married to him. Her status is then that of an *agunah*, and as such she is not permitted to remarry. At the close of the World War it was estimated that there were 100,000 *agunot* in Eastern Europe—women whose husbands had disappeared during the course of the war and who therefore were compelled to remain unmarried for the rest of their days.

It is to the shame of the rabbinate of Eastern Europe that, in the face of such hardship imposed unnecessarily by the law they administered, they made no attempt to modify that law.

In America, the Jewish law of divorce breaks down in another fashion, but with equally tragic consequences. It is frequently the case that a man and a woman go to the law courts and have their marriage dissolved, with the onus of responsibility usually on the man. The woman then discovers that she is still not free to remarry until she has obtained a *get* from her husband. But husbands often refuse to issue such bills of divorcement. Sometimes they refuse out of spite. Sometimes they demand large amounts of money, and will grant the divorce only if they are paid. In any event, many an American Jewess has been victimized by a husband from whom she was legally divorced in accordance with the laws of the state, but from whom she could procure no Jewish divorce.

The results are often tragic; those who abide by the decisions of an obsolete legal system wreck their lives, and those who remarry in defiance of Jewish law may suffer social censure. The Rabbinical Assembly of America has therefore offered this way out of the impasse, a solution entirely consistent with Jewish legal principles. The remedy it proposes is very simple. Hereafter, into each marriage contract a clause is to be inserted, through which the husband will give to his wife a power of attorney to issue a bill of divorcement under rabbinical supervision, if the husband disappears, or deserts her, or if the marriage is dissolved by a civil decree. Should the husband disappear, or desert his wife, or should he be severed from her by a civil divorce, she will then appear before the rabbinical court indicating that one of the conditions for a divorce has been fulfilled. The rabbinical court will then proceed to free her from her marriage.

The storm which the Union of Orthodox Rabbis has raised on this very simple and indispensable modification in Jewish legal procedure is really an interesting phenomenon. For observe, that the ordinance is in straight conformity with Jewish traditional law. Not one of the Orthodox rabbis has as yet given a single argument based upon Jewish juristic literature against it. And it is calculated also to preserve the authority of Jewish law. For most apparently, should the Jewish marriage law continue to work inequitable hardship as it has in the past, it will eventually fall into contempt and disuse. Yet despite all these facts, the members of the Union could find nothing to contribute to an elucidation of the problem except denunciation and invective.

We bespeak our readers' full support of the action of the Rabbinical Assembly. We ask them to publicize it and to defend it against unintelligent or partisan criticism. In doing so, they will be furthering a measure which is completely justified by every consideration of morality and legality. Judaism is the ever-growing civilization of the Jewish group, of which law is an integral part. Jewish life must be ordered by Jewish law, but that Jewish law, like that Jewish life generally, must be acceptable to intelligent human beings, and deserving of their confidence.

The Pilgrimage Festivals

By MORDECAI M. KAPLAN

I

THE distinctive achievement of the Jewish spirit lies neither in philosophy, music, letters, or the arts, although Jews have made their mark in all these fields. Its unique contribution consists in having enriched the most difficult and inclusive of arts, the art of living. The Jews do not figure among the great explorers and discoverers, but they have discovered unsuspected meanings and relationships in the human scene with the cosmos as its background, meanings and relationships which not only convert living into an art but also indicate how to become expert in it. The truth of this general observation is borne out by what the Jews did with the institution of the Pilgrimage Festivals, Pesah, Shabuot and Sukkot.

The observance of festivals was from earliest times among all peoples an expression of gratitude to the gods for granting to man life and sustenance. There was no people which did not have its spring festival, which did not rejoice in the awakening of the fertility of the soil. But there was no nation of antiquity which celebrated any festival to commemorate an historic event. *By utilizing the nature festivals to recall historical experiences, the Jews directed the human mind to the consciousness of history as an ethical and spiritual influence in human life.* "I love history," wrote H. Taine in one of his letters, "because it shows me the birth and progress of justice; and I find it all the more beautiful in that I see in it the ultimate development of human nature." The Jews loved history because it showed them the way God dealt with man and the way men should deal with each other.

Man differs from the rest of living creation mainly in the possession of self-consciousness. Other creatures live from moment to moment. If they have memories, they are not aware that those are memories. If the future in any way determines their actions, they have no mental picture of that future. The consciousness of history is as superior to the rest of human consciousness as the latter is superior to the sub-human consciousness. To have an historical consciousness means to make the past of one's people one's own past, and its future the continuation of one's own future. In a sense, the individual person is centuries, if not millenia, older than his chronological age. But if he also has a historical consciousness, he actually feels that the life which he lives extends far beyond the actual life of his body. Conscious of the experiences of the past, attached by a kind of umbilical cord to the history, the culture, the civilization of centuries, his being becomes co-extensive with the being of his people. He enjoys, as it were, an earthly immortality.

The self-consciousness of the human being, contrasted with the simple consciousness of the animal, brings in its train a whole series of purposes, ideas, values, which constitute the whole character of spiritual and ethical life. Self-consciousness gives rise to the idea of moral responsibility, and to the distinction between right and wrong. In envisaging the future, it enables man to readjust himself to life in ways that would otherwise be impossible to him. Through his sense of history, man enlarges his field of operation far beyond the range of the three generations of time with which his life is usually contemporaneous. By means of this sense, human

life is lived on a larger scale. It gives to the human being a dignity and significance which he could not otherwise possess. The individual instead of remaining merely a point on the circumference of human existence, becomes, as it were, a segment large enough by which to measure the entire circumference. Literally speaking, he becomes the bearer of collective consciousness, or individuality. This is how the human being has achieved an awareness of godhood, for it is only as a member of society that man comes to know God.

The Jews were the first to achieve national history. This means that no group before the Jews moulded its life by an awareness of its own past. Great rulers made it a point to record their achievements on stone or parchment. The records of the Egyptian kings and the Babylonian monarchs were considered part of their expression of gratitude to their particular deities for their victorious exploits. These records were part of the religious ritual expected of a ruler. The people, not being conscious of their share in these exploits, could be influenced by them but little in their outlook on life. There was in ancient times also such a thing as literary history, which was cultivated by the Greeks and the Romans. Thucydides, Xenophon, Tacitus, Livy, wrote history in the same way that fiction is now being written—as a high type of literary entertainment. But their history did not become a means of moulding national consciousness.

The nearest approach to what may be described as a sense of history was the epic poetry of the nations: the Homeric epics, the Icelandic Sagas, Beowulf, the Arthurian legends and cycles. These epic poems were originally sung or recited in the hearing of the people, who were greatly stirred by the deeds of adventure and heroism, and for the time being were fused into a living human mass that throbbed to the same names, events and emotions. As the beginning of tribal or national unity based on memories, it was also the beginning of a sense of history. But it was not carried far enough to become an ethical and spiritual influence.

A most remarkable phenomenon in the development of the collective mind, and one to which little attention has hitherto been paid, is that the various peoples of the world repudiated their own past and adopted the past of the Jewish people. The Teutons, instead of continuing to glorify the deeds of their gods and heroes, adopted the God of Israel and came to regard themselves as the decendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To appreciate what this implies, we have to recall that before the thirties of the last century all Christian children studied the history not of their own nation but of the Jewish nation. The French child did not study about Charlemagne and Jeanne d'Arc; the English child did not study about the origins of England, about the coming of the Normans; the German child did not study its own history and mythology. The child studied the history and mythology of the Jews: how God called upon the descendants of Abraham to become His nation; the stories of the Patriarchs, the legends about Joseph. The English Puritans formulated their political problems in the very terms of biblical incidents and precedents. The literary allegories of these nations were based not upon facts of their own native experience but upon biblical incidents. The Jewish past constituted the historical consciousness of all the European nations. The Protestant movement represents the coming of age of the European nations. Having outgrown the state of tutelage to which they had been subjected for centuries, they began to devolop an historical consciousness of their own which came to a head only after the French Revolution. Modern nationalism is the product of the feeling for history, of that feeling which the world caught from the Jewish people.

In contributing the sense of history to the social life of mankind, the Jews have not only enriched human life but have

also created new problems. Just as the self-conscious state brings with it responsibilities unknown to the simple consciousness of the animal, so the consciousness of history brings with it cares and ills unknown to man as long as he was unable to think in terms of history. Chauvinism, fanaticism, the deification of the state are some of those ills.

The Jews should not regret their having given to the world a sense of history. Every refinement of the human organism, every added complexity, every function which tends to increase man's power and sensitivity, is fraught with danger. Self-consciousness, the religions which grow out of it, the conception of God, the nature of society, all these have their by-product of evil. Yet that is no reason for eliminating them from human life. But this does not lessen the Jews' responsibility for counteracting with all their energy the evil which accompanies their contribution to the human spirit. They must realize that in awakening in the nations the power of historical consciousness, they have assumed the responsibility of directing that power into channels of peace and good will.

II

There is another aspect to the Pilgrimage Festivals as reminders of the past. The patriarchal traditions, the story of Israel's stay in and deliverance from Egypt, the story of Israel's journey in the Wilderness, had, no doubt, the effect of inculcating in the mind of the Israelite the truth that God who ruled the destiny of His ancestors before the conquest of the Land was the same God as the one who guided the destiny of His people in his own day. The ability to think of the same diety as governing the destinies of two distinct types of civilization, and as having manifested His power beyond the borders of His people's land, was a radical departure from the religious conceptions current among men in ancient times. Without exception, each civilization was always wont to have its own gods. Whenever a people moved from an old environment into a new one, it maintained its allegiance to the gods of the old environment for a time, but in the end its allegiance to the gods of the new environment won the upper hand. The people of Israel, however, by retaining their allegiance to YHWH, the God of the old environment, the wilderness of Sinai and Paran, in the face of the most tempting reasons to transfer their allegiance to the gods of Canaan, their new environment, accomplished a most remarkable spiritual feat. They were the first to realize that a god can retain his godhood under changing civilizations. By means of this realization, they paved the way for the recognition that the God of Israel was the God of all civilizations. That enabled the God of Israel to displace, so to speak, the gods of all other nations and to be accepted as the God of the universe.

Why did Israel remain loyal to YHWH even after it had entered Canaan? It was because the prophets and leaders of early Israel taught their people to associate YHWH with the ordering of the social forces and of the tendencies in man that govern human relationships. This was something entirely new, for all other peoples were taught to expect the display of godhood chiefly in the natural phenomena of land, sea and sky. Only secondarily, and on rare occasions, did they associate godhood with the moral forces of human life. Physical environment usually varies with locality, and may undergo radical transformation in measurable time. Not so the character of the human environment. The same desires, passions and ambitions bring the same types of conflict. Hence the emphasis upon the ethical attributes associated with the character of YHWH led to His continuing to play the role of God in the new land to which they had come and completely eclipsing the local deities they had found there. Ever after, whenever circumstances brought Jews in con-

tact with new experiences and new civilizations, they found it easy to enlarge their conception of their God to reckon with their new life.

The God-consciousness of a people is an index of what that people considers important. Outside of Israel, the God-conscionsness always came into play primarily as a phase of man's efforts to assure himself of sustenance, shelter, health and mating. These were considered as the things that principally mattered. The contriubtion of Israel to the progress of civilization consists in pushing the God-consciousness beyond the attainment of these physical necessities into those aspects of human life that distinguish that life from the subhuman, into the aspects of personality, justice and righteousness.

III

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Jews in their real zeal for history relegated nature to a secondary position in the economy of the spiritual life. The Jewish calendar is deliberately so arranged as to make sure that Pesah will always fall in the spring. Counting the months, as the Jews do, by the circuits of the moon, the month of Nisan during which Pesah comes due would shift from season to season in the course of a few years. This is prevented by the addition of an intercalary month, Adar Sheni. The reason it is important to have Pesah in the spring season is that Pesah is intended not only to commemorate the historic event of Israel's Exodus from Egypt but also to celebrate the reaping of the first harvest of the year. This shows that in the Jewish festivals both nature and history are given their due share of recognition. *Both the awakening powers in the physical world and the spiritual forces in the human world that make for personal and social redemption are treated as manifestations of the divine.*

Not only are both forms of energy thus accorded an equal degree of importance in the scheme of life, but they are by implication declared to be interdependent. We do not have a special festival to commemorate the Exodus and another one to celebrate the barley harvest, a special festival to remind us of the giving of the Torah and another one to signalize the wheat harvest, or one to recall Israel's journeyings in the Wilderness and an additional one for the purpose of thanking God for the vintage and the fruits which have been gathered in.

The two-fold aspect of life is stressed in each of the three great Pilgrimage Festivals, as if to indicate that the normal manner of reckoning with God in the world is to realize that we should serve Him by making the benefits derived from the external world a means to the growth of the human spirit. That is to say, that the function of religion is to cultivate such appreciation of the material blessings that fall to our lot as would evoke from us a sense of moral responsibility for the use to which we put them. This function of religion Judaism was the first to announce to the world, though to this day it has not yet succeeded in having its own adherents fully conscious of all that is implied in such a conception of religion.

The avowal of this function of religion which Judaism accentuates in its Pilgrimage Festivals is a protest against a generally prevailing notion that religion is a means of bringing the physical environment under control. In its crude and undeveloped form, religion was universally practiced with the concrete end in view of obtaining food. Man worshiped the spirits that he believed animated the springs, the hills, the trees and the sky, because he expected them to clothe the earth with vegetation and to multiply his sheep and his cattle.

Man did not come upon the idea of God through disinterested reflection on the beauty and order of the world. Rodin's "Thinker" pondering over the mystery of the universe is a myth. The first thinker

was no low-browed, naked savage, just emerged from the wilds, but a much civilized and highly sophisticated dweller of some ancient city. The kind of god or gods that many originally believed in required no furrowing of the brow or painful thinking to be discovered. On the contrary, primitive religion is the product of man's mental laziness. Being too lazy to think out the connection between the various elements in nature and the part they play in making life possible and supplying his needs, he jumped to the conclusion that every object had a spirit of its own which was just as fitful and subject to whims as he was. Hence, the elaborate systems of rituals and offerings, and prayers and dances, by which he believed he would cajole these spirits to give him rain, cause the sun to shine, the animals to multiply, and the earth to yield its vegetation.

The very way in which man approached his gods shows that primitive religion was not the product of mental activity. He resorted to actions by which he indicated what he wanted them to do. He enacted in dramatic form the passing of winter and the return of spring, as when he wept over the death and rejoiced in the rebirth of the god Adonis (Tammuz) in the hope that he would thereby hasten the arrival of the spring. He garbed himself in what purported to be leaves and flowers in order to precipitate the budding of the leaves and flowers of the trees. He poured libations of water in the sanctuary in order to induce the god of the sky to give him rain. This method of dramatic representation as a means of getting the gods to render abundant the yield of the earth led to all forms of licentiousness which were practiced as religious rites. These are only a few instances of the vast complex of rites repeated in every land and in every clime with the same practical purpose of getting control over the powers of nature.

IV

So long as man will depend upon the fulfillment of his elemental needs and allow his imagination instead of his reason to serve him in discovering ways and means of meeting those needs, he will think of religion chiefly as a purveyor of health, wealth and happiness. Despite the progress made by science, such aberrations as Christian 'Science', or for that matter Jewish 'Science', will win numerous disciples even among so-called people of culture. The real significance of science has not yet been grasped by the multitudes. Hence, for a long time to come people will use religion in the hope that through it they will be able to ward off illness and to secure prosperity and safety.

This utilitarian function, however, is bound to prove the undoing of religion. For ultimately man will not only acquire greater control over the forces of nature but realize how inconsistent the scientific control of nature is with the resort to magic and superstition. That is already happening with thousands of the more enlightened. Never having learned that it is possible for religion to have other than a utilitarian function, they conclude that it is bound to disappear with the enlargement of man's sphere of control over his environment. Many believing themselves sufficiently intellectual or wishing to be counted among the intellectuals act out that conclusion.

If we are convinced that religion is as inevitable a part of human civilization as is science or art, it is because we consider the main function of religion to be not utilitarian but ethical. This change of function is Judaism's contribution to the spiritual life of mankind. Judaism has taught the world that the business of religion is not to help us secure the things we need for our well being, but to get us to use those things righteously once we have secured them. It is undoubtedly much more difficult to know how to utilize, than how to retain, our health. A far greater

amount of effort is involved in the righteous use of power and influence than in winning them. The Sage who said it is more difficult to conquer one's spirit than to conquer a stronghold, knew whereof he spoke. Alexander conquered the whole world, except Alexander.

It is toward this self-conquest, this control not of the physical but the human environment, that Judaism would have religion direct its efforts. When the Greek philosophers grew wise to the folly of employing religion as a means to the control of the physical elements of nature, they transformed and exalted it into a means of cultivating social responsibility.

It is interesting to note that the Prophets contrast Israel's relation to YHWH with its relation to the other nature deities. The former is generally compared to a relationship of love, the latter to a relationship of lust. The significance of these comparisons is made clear when we realize the difference between lust and love. Lust is a physical appetite that is promiscuous in its expression. Love is a sex emotion which is selective and takes into account the personal and individual qualities of its object. By virtue of this emphasis upon personal values, great possibilties of spiritual development are made available that otherwise remain dormant. By being selective of its God Israel has singled out those qualities in Him which have become the basis of ethical monotheism. That is the outstanding service of Jewish religion.

That is the service which Judaism has been seeking to render by emphasizing the manifestation of God in history. For it is in history that God reveals Himself, in the redemptive influences in human life which liberate man from slavery to fellow man, to his physical needs and to his tools. It is in the history of mankind that we behold the forces that make for the awakening of a sense of responsibility and righteousness. "I am the Lord thy God who led thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," is the formula that gives meaning to human history. And once we arrive at a sense of direction and spiritual progress in the maze of human events, we are stimulated to turn our thoughts to the ethical and spiritual uses of the products and the possessions that fortify us against want.

The art of interpreting history is the necessary accompaniment to the art of thinking history. In transmitting that art to mankind, Judaism has taught mankind to achieve a vision of the whole which gives meaning to the parts of human life. This is no mere power of didacticism or quietist reflection. As R. Niebuhr well says, "Interpretations of history tend to verify themselves when vigorously held, because they direct the cause of history toward an inevitable goal. They validate themselves by their creative results."

V

But, then, why retain the nature aspect of the festivals? Why recall their original purpose as means of eliciting material favors from God? Why should not Pesah be confined to the celebration of the Exodus? Why be so particular about having Pesah fall in the spring of the year? Why insist upon having Sukkot fall at the time when the ingathering is over, since its main function is to recall Israel's journeyings in the Wilderness?

The answer is to be found in the fact that the ethical function of religion is subject to a peculiar aberration which can be prevented only by keeping it associated with the manifestation of God in nature. That aberration consists in the tendency to define the ethical use of the external goods as consisting in the reduction of our need for those goods to a minimum. According to that theory, to live spiritually means to dispense with the things of the world. This ascetic ideal which has ruled the world for nearly two millenia is at the basis of the belief that this life is to be treated as a time of preparation for life in the world to come, a world in which man

will be exempt from the exigencies of nature's laws. This other-worldly conception of life makes uprightness and saintliness synonymous with escape from the world of the workaday needs, contact with which is considered to be defiling.

Many thoughtful people, being under the impression that this other-worldly interpretation of the ethical function of religion is the only possible one, join the ranks of those who repudiate religion. They believe that human life is too deeply rooted in the physical environment to try to realize its higher possibilities by negating or fleeing from nature. In their opinion, religion which tries to bring out those possibilities by asking man to suppress his physical needs is asking him to breathe in a vacuum, because the air he breathes happens to be foul. It is for this reason all the more essential to emphasize the fact that originally Jewish religion did not hold this ascetic view of the ethical function of religion. It did not ask man to breathe in a vacuum. What it sought was to purify the air which he lived on. Not to flee nature, but to utilize it to the full in accordance with the will of God, is the only religion that is adapted to the physical nature of man.

That is why, despite the emphasis upon the manifestation of God in history, Jewish religion does not want to forget that He is also manifest in nature. That is why, in addition to Pesah recalling the Exodus, it retains the nature aspect of a harvest festival, and Sukkot marks the final ingathering of the produce of the fields and the orchards, in addition to Israel's journeying in the Wilderness. Giving thanks for the yield of the earth is not compatible with regarding things earthly as a necessary evil, as something to be avoided as much as possible. The purpose of the nature aspect of the Pilgrimage Festivals is not to keep alive the magical attitude of primitive civilization, but to awaken in us a sense of gratitude for the material benefits which we enjoy through the bounty of nature. Such gratitude is bound to translate itself into a realization of the responsibility as to the manner in which we employ that bounty. It is only then that we are likely to become aware that the material blessings we enjoy are not so completely ours as to be able to gratify with them some passing lust or fancy. "The earth and all that it contains belong to the Lord."

Thus, in place of the utilitarian function which paganism was accustomed to assign to religion and which still operates in the minds of those who are dominated by superstition, Jewish religion through its Pilgrimage Festivals reminds us that the purpose to be served by worshiping God is to align ourselves with Him in furthering His Kingdom of righteousness, of which the Exodus marks the initial event. And instead of looking for the establishment of that Kingdom to some other kind of world where we might not be hampered by the needs of the body, we are urged to lay its foundations in the earthly scene of changing seasons, of rivers and fields and cities taking on new life each year, with the returning sun.

In the ritual of grace after meals, we voice this conception of religion. First we thank God for having supplied us with the necessaries of life. Then we thank Him for the opportunities He has afforded us, through delivering us from Egypt, and giving us a land and a Torah, to utilize that life to bring about the era of universal peace, when "God's Name will be blessed by the mouth of all living."

Empty Gestures

By Ben Zion Bokser

I

THE degree of concern with social questions manifested recently by religious spokesmen is impressively large. Official church bodies and synagogue groups as well as individual clergymen have spoken with fervor and with courage against war and for a better social order. One still remembers the 12,904 clergymen, out of 20,870, who responded to the *World Tomorrow* questionnaire on war and economic justice, that it was their "present purpose not to sanction any future war nor participate as armed combatants," and the almost equally large number who voted for a drastically reformed capitalism or for an outright collectivist economy. What is the intrinsic worth of these declarations? Have they atcually reckoned with all the complicated social issues involved; are religionists really prepared, if not to take the leadership, at least to join as active allies in the vital movements for social reconstruction? It will be well to analyze this question in the light of John Bennett's "Social Salvation,"* which is a full exposition of the typical religious approach to the problems of social change.

Mr. Bennett's book is somewhat marred by an overemphasis upon sectarian theology. He writes as if the concern with social values is peculiar to his version of Christianity; he is unmindful of the fact that it is a characteristic of all spiritually developed religions. His terminology is drawn, to an excess, from the vocabulary of the Church. Greed, for example, he equates throughout with sin, and social change with social repentance. Disregarding, however, peculiarities of style and approach, Mr. Bennett takes a number of significant positions concerning the relation between religion and society.

The major task of religion, admits Mr. Bennett, is the spiritual life or the cultivation of the soul. But it is not possible, for most of us, to cultivate properly the spiritual life in a social framework that is not conducive to it. Poverty, the concentration of power, war, the dominance of profit seeking, and the blinding effect of a depersonalized society, essential elements in our present social order, all undermine personality and make spiritual developments extremely difficult. Religion must, therefore, be interested in such changes as will purge society of these abuses. This is possible if we build a cooperative economy based on production for use and not for profit.

Mr. Bennett also deals with the type of strategy that the Church can use in carrying its general social interests into action. "The first thing which the church must do in season and out of season is the teaching and preaching of the basic ethical and religious principles which are relevant to the social problem. It must call its people to dedication to the general social goals which grow out of the Christian ideal or which are the conditions of salvation." It can and must expose the specific evils of our present society, thereby sensitizing the consciences of its adherents. It should support various measures of social amelioration, such as unemployment insurance, the right of labor to collective bargaining and the abolition of child labor. Through the development of pioneering religious social groups, such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, and the Church League for Industrial Democracy, a more positive social program may be developed. But beyond that, warns Mr. Bennett, "the form that the new system should take and the political strategy which is necessary to bring it about, raise questions which are clearly

*Scribner's, New York, 1935.

outside the province of the Church—though there are forms and strategies which it can condemn."

One of the strategies which the Church should condemn, though Mr. Bennett writes about this with a large measure of restraint, is the use of force and violence. The "violent destruction of persons, or even the threat of it, consolidates the opposition, makes both sides callous, and creates passions which soon get beyond control." Mr. Bennett is aware that this sentence has not dealt adequately enough with the problem and he continues the argument in a footnote. Violent revolution would, for one thing, be impractical in America. "It would consolidate the middle classes against social change. It would have to reckon with the military power of the State which would be quite a different thing from undermining the resistance of the Russian army made up of disillusioned peasants and workers and controlled by a demoralized State. It would run the risk of destroying so much in a highly industrialized society that the result would be social chaos. A new order built by war would have to be maintained by the methods of war and that would mean in practice an intolerable terror. . . ." Even if the changes sought were achieved peacefully a counter-revolution would be started by the reactionary forces. Mr. Bennett is not entirely certain that he would sanction force to check it. "The place where the greatest danger of violence enters is in the possible necessity of taking police measures to put down counter-revolution . . . but the fact must be faced that such police measures might involve far more violence than accompanies police measures against criminals."

In the light of this realization, Mr. Bennett insists that "no social group should make the decisive moves in the direction of peaceful revolution unless it can expect the consent of the vast majority of the people. It should undercut opposition by compensating present owners up to a reasonable limit." Mr. Bennett concludes with a final flourish: "The Church and the individual Christian must preach in season and out of season the essential evil in all violence. Their main task is to insert into every situation those persuasive and redemptive forces which makes violence unnecessary, or which modify its effects and break that vicious circle which violence usually produces. Their way is a way which prefers to accept the cross to the use of violence against persons. . . ."

The position of Mr. Bennett is, stated differently, the position of most religious liberals. Couched in a Jewish terminology, it is the position of the Rabbinical Assembly's Pronouncement on Social Justice. The degree of its social adequacy is obvious. It recognizes the relationsihp between personal salvation and social salvation, and it affirms that the redemption of our social order is a prerequisite for the redemption of individual souls. It diagnoses correctly what the redemption of our social order must be. Courageously applied, it would put all the resources of organized religion behind a program of social reform. It would make of religion an effective weapon in the fight against Fascism and war, those twin enemies that are menacing western civilization. When one contrasts this with the attitude of the old Russian church which actually functioned as a pillar of the Czarist autocracy or with the present day Austrian church which helped to destroy the Social-Democratic republic and inaugurate Fascism, it represents a distinct social advance.

II

But we must beware of one fallacy, a fallacy that may prove very costly in its social results. No one denies that a peaceful transition into the new social order would be ideal. The abrogation of civil liberties, the use of force, and civil war, are no welcome methods for people working for social betterment. The apostle of social revolution, Karl Marx, himself, expressed the hope that in America and in

England democratic methods might suffice for the creation of the new social order. But Mr. Bennett's position seems to be—and it is the position of most religious liberals—that under no circumstances dare we apply coercion, that where peaceful methods do not avail, the only moral thing to do is to submit. Where is the justification for that?

How about the loss of life involved in the persistence of the status quo, with its inevitable concomitants of mass exploitation, starvation, unemployment, and imperialist war? In the light of what we know today, is there any doubt that a tremendous saving of human life would have been the result, if the Social-Democrats had dared to apply the revolutionary techniques when revolutionary situations had developed in their respective countries after the World War? Assume that the Italian campaign in Ethiopia is protracted and discontent develops in the Italian army, would it be really unethical for a disciplined minority to direct this discontent into anti-Fascist channels and then, overthrowing Mussolini, proceed to build a new social order which would put an end to imperialistic campaigns for all time to come?

III

An affirmative answer to these questions involves the general proposition that the end justifies the means, which is to many of us unpleasant. But is not this the only consistent position to take? We are living in an imperfect world where situations arise that bring our most cherished values into conflict and we must choose between the one or the other. God, the Midrash points out, once misrepresented a remark of the matriarch Sarah in order not to embarrass her before her husband, sacrificing truth for domestic peace. Though believing that reverence for life is basic to all morality, a physician may have to choose between two types of life, and sacrifice an unborn infant to save the life of the mother. Moses employed violence in rescuing the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, and if we believe that God administered the ten plagues, then God Himself used violence. Jewish tradition indeed regrets the loss of Egyptian life. God silenced the angelic chorus that was chanting Hosannas at the deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea. "The Egyptians, also my children, are drowning in the sea and yet you chant rejoicings?" God is quoted as having said to them. Yet that loss of life was apparently necessary in the light of the tragic alternative. The prophets never hesitated to disturb the social peace in behalf of social justice. R. Akiba blessed the sword of Bar Kokba, hoping that it might achieve freedom for his people. In Jewish eschatology too, we have the vision of a great catastrophe, with a great destruction of sinners, that will precede the final era of peace. Apparently some evil doers cannot be redeemed and must be destroyed, not as a welcome act but as a tragic necessity, to prevent the more costly alternative.

Expediency may prevent the individual minister from going beyond a general reformist position. There would be no sense in his going beyond that and making a martyr of himself. In a situation of that sort the liberal minister can render signal service to his cause by remaining with his people and continuing his work of sensitizing them in the general direction of ethical idealism. But there is certainly no justification for making a virtue out of a necessity and reading a position which is imposed by the expediency of an immediate situation into the very nature of things. There are situations when the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace will prevail and of course we want to follow them. But to say in advance that under no circumstances will you sanction coercion is to guarantee the perpetuators of the present social evils undisputed supremacy. To do that is to reduce all ethical ideals into empty gestures. For what else will they be if we do not posit, together with them, a technique whereby they may be carried into action?